United Nations A/C.1/53/PV.2

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

First Committee
2nd Meeting
Thursday, 17 September 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Mernier . . . . . (Belgium)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: May I first welcome Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. We are very pleased to see him with us.

At the outset, I should like to extend a warm and sincere welcome to all delegations participating in the deliberations of the First Committee at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. I take advantage of this opportunity to express my profound appreciation to all Member States for the privilege and honour they have bestowed upon me and my country by electing me Chairman of this important body of the General Assembly. I am honoured and deeply indebted to all members for the trust and confidence they have placed in me.

Moreover, I also wish to express, on behalf of all the members of the Committee as well as on my own behalf, our congratulations to Mr. Nkgowe on the skilful and effective manner in which he conducted the proceedings of the First Committee at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

As I assume my duty as Chairman of this body, it is gratifying for me to know that I can count on the cooperation of all members of the Committee, as well as on the valuable experience and profound knowledge of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, Mr. Jin Yongjian, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Dhanapala, and the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-chung, and his colleagues in the Secretariat, who will greatly contribute to the successful completion of our work.

At this organizational meeting, the Committee will proceed to the election of officers of the Committee, namely the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur, and to the adoption of the programme of work and the timetable of the Committee for the current session.

Election of the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur

The Chairman: I wish to inform the Committee that three candidates for the three posts of Vice-Chairman have been nominated by various regional groups: Ms. Akmaral Arystanbekova of Kazakhstan from the Group of Asian States; Mr. Raimundo González of Chile from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States; and Mr. Aleg Laptsenak of Belarus from the Group of Eastern European States.

There being no objection, I shall take it that in accordance with rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and with established practice, the Committee wishes to dispense with the secret ballot and to declare Ms. Arystanbekova of Kazakhstan, Mr. González of Chile and Mr. Laptsenak of Belarus elected Vice-Chairmen of the First Committee by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I would like to warmly congratulate Ambassadors Arystanbekova and González and Mr. Laptsenak on their election to the

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This record contains the original texts of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

post of Vice-Chairman of the First Committee. I am certain that their great experience in the field of disarmament will prove most useful to the Committee.

With regard to the post of Rapporteur, consultations within the African Group are still ongoing. I suggest that the Committee take this issue up at a later date. There being no objection, it is so decided.

Mr. Coutts (Chile) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to serve as Chairman of such an important Committee. I know that your experience will help us achieve the positive results we all seek. I would also like, on behalf of Ambassador Raimundo González and the delegation of Chile, to express their gratitude for the support he has received in his election to the post of Vice-Chairman of the Committee, particularly the support of the Latin American and Caribbean Group. Mr. González has asked me to tell you that he considers it a great privilege to serve under your able leadership in cooperation with all of the delegations present.

Mr. Kazykanov (Kazakhstan): The head of our delegation, Ambassador Akmaral Arystanbekova, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan, will have an opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee during the general debate on all disarmament and international security issues. We share her congratulations as well. You can count on our delegation's cooperation and support in your important task.

On behalf of the Ambassador, I would like to thank representatives participating in the work of the First Committee for the great honour they have bestowed upon her and our country in electing her as Vice-Chairperson of this important Committee. As a newly elected Vice-Chairperson of the Committee, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan will make her best effort to make our common endeavour a successful one.

Mr. Laptsenak (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): First, I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to your very important post. In the past few years many of us have had the pleasure of working with you in the First Committee and in a number of very important forums, and we greatly appreciate your experience and knowledge of specific issues before us during this session.

I would like to express thanks on behalf of the Eastern European Group for the trust placed in me by electing me to the Bureau of the Committee. The Belarus delegation intends to participate actively in consideration of all items on the agenda, as it has done in the past. We intend to do our utmost, Mr. Chairman, to assist you in enhancing the effectiveness of the Committee's work. You can count on the delegation of Belarus.

I should also like to congratulate the other officers of the Committee on their election and to welcome Under-Secretary-General Dhanapala and other officials of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. We worked closely with them earlier, when Belarus was Chairman of the First Committee, and this year, as Belarus has served as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, and in a number of expert groups. We look forward to working with such high-level experts. We assure you of our readiness to work together constructively at this session of the General Assembly. The delegation of Belarus believes that under your able guidance we will be able to move ahead in our work.

Organization of work

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): I would like to draw your attention to document A/C.1/53/1, containing a letter dated 15 September 1998, from the President of the General Assembly addressed to me, informing me of the Assembly's decision to allocate 18 agenda items to the First Committee for consideration.

According to established practice, the First Committee begins its substantive work immediately after the conclusion of the general debate in plenary. For this session, that should be on 5 October. However, a number of delegations pointed out that the Ad Hoc Group of the Biological Weapons Convention meeting in Geneva could not conclude its session prior to 9 October. To avoid an overlapping of meetings of the First Committee and the Ad Hoc Group, they have proposed that the Committee postpone for one week, until 12 October, the beginning of its substantive work.

I have consulted with delegations in the past week, and it seems a majority would agree to begin the substantive work of the First Committee on 12 October. However, deviation from the established practice this year must not be taken as a precedent for the future and is simply an exception.

On the question of the closing date of the deliberations, it will be recalled that at the resumed session, on 29 June, the First Committee adopted a decision under the agenda item entitled "Rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee". This decision was then adopted by the General Assembly as decision 52/416 B, paragraph (a) (i) of which states that as from the fifty-third session, the First Committee

> "Will make every effort to conduct and conclude its substantive work with the most efficient use of time in not less than 30 meetings and in a time-frame not exceeding five weeks."

Consequently, the Committee will conclude its session on 13 November 1998.

Paragraph (a) (ii) of that same decision states that the First Committee

> "Will conduct its work by combining the existing phases in the programme of work: 'Structured discussion of specific subjects on the adopted thematic approach on disarmament and international security agenda items' and 'Consideration of all draft resolutions submitted under all agenda items', provided that sufficient time is allowed for informal consultations and discussions on all draft resolutions."

Accordingly, this year the First Committee will have only three phases of work, as reflected in the draft programme of work and timetable before you. The first phase will be the general debate on all agenda items allocated to the Committee, including the item on rationalization of its work. This phase will begin on 12 October and end on 22 October and will include 12 meetings, which should be quite sufficient for the general debate. The second phase will consist of eight meetings, from 23 October to 2 November. It will be devoted to the thematic discussion of agenda items and the introduction and consideration of draft resolutions. During this period, delegations may introduce relevant draft resolutions and conduct the relevant negotiations thereon.

The last phase of the Committee's work will be devoted to taking action on all draft resolutions. Eleven meetings are allocated for this purpose; they will begin on 3 November and end on 13 November, which is the date on which the Committee will conclude its session.

Regarding the deadline for submission of draft resolutions, in order to facilitate the work and give delegations sufficient time for consultations, the Committee might wish to set Friday, 23 October, at 1 p.m. as the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions on all disarmament and international security questions. The deadline for submissions of drafts under agenda item 80, "Rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee", will be Friday, 23 October, at 6 p.m.

(*spoke in English*)

With these brief remarks I would like to propose a programme of work and timetable as contained in document A/C.1/53/CRP.1. This programme of work and timetable, as you are aware, was considered and accepted *ad referendum* at the informal meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, 16 September. I hope the Committee will be in a position to approve it today.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the First Committee adopts the programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/53/CRP.1.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I should now like to draw the attention of the Committee to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly affecting the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in Assembly decision 34/401. In order to fully utilize the time and conference services made available to the Committee, I would like, with your cooperation and support, to convene meetings at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. sharp. Permit me to strongly emphasize the utmost importance of punctuality in the interest of ensuring an effective and orderly organization of our work and achieving economies for our Organization.

I now give the floor to the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-chung, to make a statement.

Mr. Lin Kuo-chung (Secretary of the First Committee): With your indulgence, I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the following points concerning the organization of work.

First, the General Assembly has decided once again to depart during this session from the rule that one quarter of members must be present before a meeting of a Main Committee may be declared open and debate permitted to proceed. The Assembly made this recommendation on the understanding that such a departure from the rules did not

involve any permanent change in the relevant provisions of rules 67 and 108 of the rules of procedure pertaining to the opening of meetings, whereby a majority of members must be present for any decision to be taken.

Secondly, as indicated in the programme of work and the timetable, the list of speakers for the general debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items will be closed on Monday, 12 October, at 6 p.m. A number of delegations have already inscribed their names on that list. I urge those delegations wishing to participate in the general debate to kindly inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible so that the Committee can fully utilize the time and conference facilities available to it. In this connection, delegations are requested to provide at least 30 copies of their prepared statement to the conference officer for conference servicing purposes. For general distribution, 300 copies should be available to the Secretariat.

Thirdly, with regard to the submission of draft resolutions, I would like to remind delegations that draft resolutions and amendments and the names of the sponsors thereof should be submitted to the Secretariat in writing to ensure their accuracy and to avoid any possible misunderstanding. In particular, those draft resolutions which may entail programme budget implications should be submitted as early as possible so that the Budget Division of the Secretariat can work on them in time for adoption by the Committee.

Fourthly, I should like to draw the attention of Committee members to General Assembly decision 34/401, particularly to its provision dealing with the explanation of vote and the right of reply, namely paragraphs 6, 7, and 8 of that decision, which pertain to those particular issues.

Fifthly, I should also like to draw the Committee's attention to document A/C.1/53/INF.1, which will be issued at a later date. This document will list, for purposes of information and ready reference, all documents before the First Committee issued as of 5 October 1998. That list will be updated as appropriate.

Sixthly, delegations are requested to kindly submit the names of members of their delegations to the Secretariat as soon as possible, so that the Secretariat can circulate the Committee's membership list as early as possible.

Lastly, I understand that a number of group meetings will be held during this session. Requests for use of conference rooms for group meetings should also be submitted in writing as early as possible, so that the necessary arrangements can be made in time.

The Chairman: If no delegation wishes to make any comments or remarks at this stage, I propose to adjourn the meeting now. As scheduled, the Committee will begin its substantive work on Monday, 12 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.